PLAYING CARDS IN NEW LIGHT

History Told In Packs of All Countries and All Times Gathered by Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer

WHAT is said to be the most complete collection of playing cards in the world is the property of Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, who founded the original chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in New York city.

Her collection was begun twenty years ago with a pack brought back by a traveller from Algiers. It has grown until it fills dozens of broad, shallow drawers in a specially made waist high mahogany cabinet in the library of her home. The cards themselves are on yard square sheets of red pasteboard, held in place by strips of the same material.

Some of the cards are in separate boxes of their own, like the round, red edged pack from Hindustan with its eight suits and the long, slender Bavarian cards made of celluloid with only room for a single emblem and the number. A few of the most interesting of the packs are hanging framed in the entrance hall along with a pen sketch of a New York ball of thirty years ago, in which every face is an easily recognizable likeness.

Perhaps the strangest of the packs is painted with the Spanish emblems of rods, swords, money and cups and the cavalier on horseback instead of the queen. It is on a yellowish, slightly wrinkled substance.

"No, it is not leather," Mrs. Van Rensselaer corrects. "It is skin—human skin. The pack was bought in a locked handbag at a railroad auction. A man who came to see my collection told me the history of the pack."

Briefly, the bag belonged to the young wife of an army officer at a Western post. She was very badly treated and found her only consolation in long games of solitaire and the sympathy of all her acquaintances. Among these was the young chief of a tribe of Indians on a neighboring reservation who worked about the fort. After a particularly brutal outbreak he followed the officer into the hills, killed him and made a pack of cards out of his skin. They were painted with vegetable dyes in the Spanish emblems, the only ones the Indian knew. When the pack was finished he sent it to the wife with the message that he knew it would be more of a comfort to her than her husband had ever been.

Horrified though she was, she decided not to betray the young chief, but to take the grewsome reminder East and bury it in the family vault. But her care of her handbag convinced the porter on the train that it contained her jewels and he stole it. Before she could have any thorough search made for the bag the train was wrecked. She decided that her bag must have been destroyed and went back West, where she presently married another officer and is now living happily. The porter was killed and the locked bag, found in his closet, was sold by the railroad company.

Not all of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's cards have such startling stories connected with them. Most of them have come from the dusty top shelves of the little stalls which card making families of Europe have kept for generations. The histories of some of the packs will never be known. What vicissitudes brought the pack of the King of Wurtemberg, who married the daughter of George III., to a little tobacconist's shop? It is in a leather case with his name on it. It has only the king and an upper and lower knave for court cards, while the suit cards show acorns, leaves, hearts and bells brilliantly colored, instead of the sober red and black of French cards.

As a people Americans have made no contributions to the history of cards, Mrs. Van Rensselaer says, except to add the joker to the French pack. But that card carries the pack back into the mists of antiquity, even to the casting of rods mentioned in the Bible.

In her new book, "Prophetical, Educational and Playing Cards," she traces the history of the cards back to the worship of Mercury, the Nebo of the Abyssinians, and the Thoth of the Egyptians. The Gypsies brought him with them when they came to wander over Europe. For it was to consult Mercury, the joker, that the rest of the pack was invented.

Originally Mercury was consulted in his own temples. Various figures were the inquirer cast bundles of rods, painted on the walls, and before these swords, money or cups. By the way they fell the priests foretold the future.

All four emblems were sacred to Mercury, who was the cupbearer of the gods before he got too busy and had to give up the job to Hebe. The offerings of money meant that he was the god of merchants and of thieves. He always carried a rod or caducsus, which Apollo had given him in exchange for the lyre he had invented. And he had stolen the sword of Mars. As a messenger of the gods he presided at births and deaths, conducting the soul across the Styx or writing the ruture of the new born on the tablets of fate. Naturally he was the god of physicians, who carried his sacred staff into the sick room. It is still left to us in the barber pole, painted to simulate bandages. Mercury was busy; but he was decidedly the divinity to consult.

But with the coming of Christianity the walls of his temples were razed. So the pictures, and the bundles of rods, swords, money and cups were transferred to bits of parchment. Again the way in which they fell foretold the future. The first card game was played by two persons, the man who came to consult, and the priest or soothsayer, who interpreted the cards. Besides the twenty-one picture cards, which represented all sorts of things from Mercury to the wheel of fortune, strength, justice, death and temperance, all appear along with the world, the devil, the sun and the fool. Besides these atouts, as they were called, there were the four suits, with four court cards, a cavalier mounted on horseback, as well as the king, queen and jack, and the ten suit cards.

These fortune telling cards are still used in Italy, the only country where the picture cards have survived, except in Persia, where they are used without the suit pack. Mrs. Van Rensselaer has a very rare and valuable old atout pack discovered in the wainscoting of a Venetian palace and dating from the sixteenth century. They form illustrations in her book.

It was many years before the cards were used to play games. But one ill fated evening Charles VI. of France went to a masked ball given by one of his favorites, Hugonin de Jouzes. Charles and five of his courtiers were dressed precisely alike, with red cloaks and long beards of tow, and chained together. Every one was trying to find the King, and his brother, the Duc d'Orleans, snatched up a torch to look more closely. Instantly the tow-beards were in flames. Chained together the maskers were hopelessly tangled in a flaming mass. The King was saved by his aunt, the Duchesse de Berri, who recognized him and threw her cloak about him. But his mind was unbalanced by the shock.

To divert him and keep him from meddling in affairs of state his secretary invented the game of piquet. The clumsy Italian pack was shortened to its four suits and the cavalier was dropped. The symbols too were simplified. The cups were changed to hearts in honor of Jacques Cœur, the King's banker. The rods were changed to clover leaves as a compliment to Agnes Sorel, the King's mistress. The swords were changed to halbert heads, and the round coins of the money suit to diamonds.

The varied colorings of the old pack were simplified to plain black and red. So the suits stood—cœurs, carreaux, trefles and piques. They soon went across the Channel to England. The Dauphin was betrothed to an English Princess, Elizabeth of York, who dressed in French fashion and was taught to play piquet. But eventually he married Anne of Brittany. Elizabeth introduced the French cards, slightly modified, at court. The queen shows her face and costume, with the rose in memory of the War of the Roses. The king is not her husband, but Henry VIII., her son. The French halberts looked like spades to the English courtiers and received that name. For clubs they went back to the old rod suit. French numbers still cling in the deuce and trey. Other games besides piquet and ombre sprang into favor after 1400. The ancestor of poker has been said to be primero, and it had many of its terms, such as flush. Whist came from a game called triumph, soon shortened to trump, to denote the leading suit. In France the old name of the fortune telling picture cards, atout, is still used to denote trump, though no atouts have been used in France for centuries.

The cards grew so popular that some cheaper means than painting them by hand was necessary, and the xylographic art came to foreshadow the printing press. Early in the fifteenth century the makers of Augsburg had became so skilful that laws were enacted in Italy and Austria to protect local makers against them.

French packs have no joker and those which came to America from the northeast had none. But those which came from the southwest were Spanish and showed the joker.

When the game of euchre originated in Pennsylvania the joker had to be used and the Spanish card was added to the pack instead of the blank card which the arrangement on the sheets had left. Soon the manufacturers began to decorate it, usually with designs confusingly like the ace of spades. Finally the fool in cap and bells emerged—Mercury in one of his guises, though the slender figure with winged cap and sandals is more familiar.

It is not generally known that playing cards formed the first visiting cards. That fact would probably have comforted the woman who sent her new footman to get her cards from the library table. After a hard afternoon of calls so formal that she never left the carriage she said:

"Now, Wilkins, we have only five more and then you may tell Martin to drive home."

"Sorry, ma'am," he replied, "but we can't go to five places, for we've got only the six of diamonds and the jack of spades left!"

There are many other treasures in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's cabinet. An old Nuremberg pack shows the dresses of peasants of 300 years ago. There are long, slender cards from Corea and Chinese cards that look like nothing Western except a laundry list. Cards used during the civil war show flag, shield, eagle and star instead of the familiar pips. Grant is the king, Columbia the queen and Elsworth the knave.

Another truly American pack, since it gave New York city one of its well known families, came from Austria many years ago. A young nobleman was expelled from Vienna for some card card scrape. He asked his betrothed for her miniature and her garter and locked them up in a little box with the pack which had been his undoing. They were all he brought to America, but he made a fortune and years later he wrote to his sweetheart asking her to come and marry him. She replied that after years had passed without a word from him she had married another. So the lover married an American girl and the pack was given to Mrs. Van Rensselaer by his youngest daughter.

It is a strange pack, for beneath the pips and high Roman numerals it bears pictures of Alice in Wonderland animals such as never were on land or sea. Its place is really in the Historical Society rooms with the two old packs there.

The EASTER EDITION Sun.

NO newspaper has ever published such an interesting, artistic and elaborate number as will be issued by THE SUN next Sunday. This Special Easter Number will have supplements numbering forty pages, on fine paper, with beautiful halftone illustrations. This will be in addition to the regular news and semi-news sections.

An Intaglio Printed Art Supplement

This will consist of 8 pages showing recently taken photographs of the Holy Land and the True Stations of the Cross as they look to-day. Also four pages of charming paintings by celebrated artists. These latter will be reproduced by the famous Intaglio process used only by THE SUN in America.

Among the well known artists whose work will embellish this issue are

JEAN BERAUD	PENRHYN STANLAWS
EUGENE BURNAND	CHARLES DANA GIBSON
J. WENCKER	AND
A. B. FROST	JESSIE WILCOX SMITH

Attractive and Important Pictorial Magazine

This section will consist of 16 pages. While profusely illustrated it will contain many highly important articles. Among them one by Joseph H. Choate, who speaks for the framers of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, whose lips are now sealed by death. J. I. C. Clarke, now at Panama for THE SUN, explains the menace to the canal of the Culebra cut slides. These are only samples of many others, some, however, in a much lighter vein.

Sixteen Page Fashion and Woman's Magazine

This will contain an illustrated article by the Queen of Spain's chamberlain, who proves by her dressmaking bills that she is the most expensively dressed sovereign in the world.

Also not only photographs of the latest fashions seen at the spring openings in Paris and described by Anne Rittenhouse but also seven full pages of illustrations of the pick of the costumes in the following New York and Brooklyn shops:

ARNOLD, CONSTABLE & CO.	OPPENHEIM COLLINS & CO.
BEST & CO.	O'NEILL-ADAMS CO.
BONWIT, TELLER & CO.	FRANKLIN SIMON & CO.
BLOOMINGDALE BROS.	SAKS & CO.
GIMBEL BROS.	STERN BROS.
GREENHUT-SIEGEL COOPER	JOHN WANAMAKER
J. L. KESNER & CO.	J. M. GIDDINGS & CO.
LORD & TAYLOR	ABRAHAM & STRAUS
R. H. MACY & CO.	FREDERICK LOESER & CO.
JAS. M'CREERY & CO.	A. D. MATTHEWS' SONS

Other pages on French house furnishing, beautiful interior decorations in New York homes and all sorts of things that particularly appeal to women.

Boys' and Girls' Own Magazine

This section is of 8 pages and contains the first of the Dickens stories in tabloid form retold by Hallie Erminie Rives especially for young folks.

This issue of THE SUN will be sold out early, and no second edition will be printed. To make sure of a copy order of your newsdealer at once and avoid being disappointed.

The Easter Edition of

THE SUNDAY SUN

NEXT SUNDAY

EARLY BIRD COMMUTER AND OTHERS.

Not all the commuters come to town in luxurious trains or at luxurious hours; some must rise early.

A town twenty miles out, on a frosty morning; the hour 6:45, and even the sun but just up and still red in the face as it climbs above the horizon. The village street still quiet and deserted, except for a scattering man or two hurrying to catch this train; all the life to be seen is around the railroad stations.

It isn't very lively even there. You do see a string of people waiting to take this train, but they stand along pretty quietly; it isn't exactly jolly to have to get up and get breakfast and catch the 6:45 train. As they come along they buy newspapers at the station.

Then if you look a mile up the straight track you see the exhaust steam of a locomotive boiling up in a white cloud in the frosty air. Then you hear the rails singing and here the locomotive comes looming bigger and bigger. Now her bell is ringing and now here she is, halting at the station. Two or three men who had preferred shelter while they waited open the station door and come out and step calmly aboard with those who had been waiting outside, and now you hear the bell ringing again, and the engine's slow exhaust as the engineer gives her steam.

As the train starts one belated commuter comes across the tracks and steps aboard without touching either hand rail—smoothly done, but still a dangerous thing to do. As the train gathers headway one more man comes, loping, to stand beside the moving train and grasp the hand rails as a platform comes along and swings himself aboard—more dangerous still. Now the train is under rapid headway and is gone; to leave the town and the station, once more deserted.

But not for long. The streets leading to the station begin to people and from now on the trains come at more and more frequent intervals, and they are longer. The main street is doing business now and the people waiting for trains stand along in throngs; the station is a place of activity. Plenty of people don't come till the last minute, but at this hour more come leisurely. People say good morning; and there is a flutter of newspapers; and while for the most part they just stand around and wait for the train, still some discuss the affairs of the town or of the nation; at this hour there seems to be more time for talk. For that 6:45 train there were maybe twenty commuters, including one woman; for this train an hour or more later there are waiting two or three hundred or more, including twenty or thirty or more women.

And now again that white cloud of steam shows up the road; the long train rolls in and the waiting people step aboard to leave the station once more empty as the train moves on; a new line then beginning to form to wait for the next train. Those early birds who took the 6:45 are now in the city and already at work.

SNOW KEEPS FIREMEN BUSY.

One body of men who do not relish a snowstorm are the firemen. A snowfall means that the firemen must get busy and clear away all the snow in front of the engine houses.

The task is arduous. The firemen have to clear not only the sidewalk but also the street over to the curb on the other side. When a firehouse is in the middle of the block it is not unusual for the firemen to clear away the snow to the corner so that the apparatus shall not be impeded and shall have easy going to the avenues, where car tracks are always kept clear by electric sweepers.